

CANINE — FELINE NUTRITION



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SNACKS AND TREATS

Snacks and treats have become increasingly popular with pet owners in recent years. A survey conducted in 1965 showed that Nabisco's Milk Bones dominated the treat market, and the choice of snacks at that time was extremely limited. However, in less than 20 years, almost every major pet food company began marketing some type of dog or cat snack.⁴⁶ This increase can be theorized to reflect some of the changing roles that dogs and cats have had in our society within the last few decades. Pet owners purchase treats not because of their nutritional value but as a way of showing love and affection for their pets. Feeding and caring for a pet is a nurturing process, and giving pets "special" snacks generates the positive feelings that accompany nurturing and the expression of affection. Pet owners also give their dogs treats and snacks as training aids to reinforce desired behaviors, at times of arrival or departure, as a means of providing a sense of variety in the pet's diet, and as an aid to proper dental health.⁴⁷

However, most pet owners buy pet treats for emotional reasons. Therefore palatability to the pet is of chief importance. Owners are less concerned with the nutritional value of a snack than they are with its appearance and palatability. In the early years, all dog treats were in the form of baked biscuits. Over time, different shapes, sizes, and flavors of biscuits were developed and marketed. Because treats are usually impulse buys, owners are more likely to try a new flavor or type of treat than they are to completely switch dog or cat food. To capitalize on this, manufacturers have continued to develop new types of dog and cat snacks. Today, treats can be categorized into four basic types—semimoist, biscuits, jerky, and rawhide products. Cat treats are usually in the form of either semimoist or biscuit products, while rawhides and jerky products are highly palatable to many dogs. Many treats are made to resemble foods that humans normally eat, such as hamburgers, sausage, bacon, cheese, and even ice cream. Examples of several popular treat concepts include snacks that are made with all-natural ingredients, that promote dental health, or that are made from livestock body parts such as ears, hooves, or even noses.

Although treats and snacks do not have to be nutritionally complete, a significant proportion of these products are formulated to be complete and balanced, and some carry the same nutritional label claims as dog and cat foods. In general, treats and snacks are highly palatable and cost significantly more than other types of pet foods when compared on a weight basis. Part of this cost is a reflection of the larger amounts of marketing effort and money directed toward making the product attractive to pet owners.⁴⁸ Although some snacks and treats can provide complete nutrition, they are not required to be nutritionally complete and are not intended for this purpose.

BRANDS OF PET FOODS

Popular

Brands of commercial pet foods can be classified into three general categories—popular, premium, and generic. The popular brands include foods that are marketed